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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1242  
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 8068  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 4090  
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 2770  
RUEHNAG/AMCONSUL NAGOYA 0563  
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA 5118  
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 6561  
RUEHKS/AMCONSUL SAPPORO 3321  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3483  
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UNCLAS TOKYO 000498

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE PASS USDA FOR FAS OA, ONA, OCRA AND OFSO/KWAINIO,  
MBEILLARD  
USTR FOR EHOLLOWAY, BCHATTIN, CBERTSCH, DSEIDBAND, AND  
ABURDETT  
STATE FOR EEB/TPP AND EAP/J

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ETRC](#) [TBIO](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: DEMARCHE DELIVERED: PROBLEMS WITH AG MINISTRY  
STORAGE OF IMPORTED RICE

REF: STATE 19794

11. Sensitive but Unclassified. Not for Internet  
distribution.

12. (SBU) Responding to demarche points contained in reftel,  
Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) Staple Foods Department  
International Office Director Tadashi Sato stated imported  
rice is more susceptible to mold than Japanese domestic rice  
due to variables such as sea freight shipping conditions.  
Such rice, Sato told Embassy FAS and econoffs March 4,  
therefore must be subject to a higher level of scrutiny. As  
the "seller" of imported rice, MAFF has to take extra  
precautions to ensure the safety of this product, he said.  
Sato insisted as well that MAFF's press releases are  
unbiased. Emboffs strongly expressed U.S. dissatisfaction  
that imported rice is held to much higher inspection  
standards and urged equal treatment for imported and Japanese  
domestic rice.

13. (SBU) Arguing the GOJ position, Sato said the "Scientific  
Committee on Mold on Government-Held Rice," a group made up  
of researchers, scientists, and MAFF officials that convened  
in December 2008 following an incident involving  
aflatoxin-tainted rice from Thailand, had determined that  
imported rice is subject to certain conditions that increase  
the risk of mold. These conditions, Sato continued, include  
differences in the regulatory standards applied to producers  
and the lack of climate-controlled shipping containers. That  
most imported rice is milled also increases its  
susceptibility to mold, Sato stated. By comparison, Sato  
argued, Japanese rice is delivered to the local cooperative  
and stored in its facilities on a short-term basis as brown  
rice and immediately removed from the distribution network if  
mold is found. (Comment: Sato seemed to imply that because  
domestic rice never leaves the seller's control, it is a  
higher quality product. End comment.) Based on the  
Subcommittee's recommendations, MAFF revised its inspections  
procedures to include visual inspections of every bag of rice  
in preparation for sale from MAFF-controlled and  
MAFF-affiliated warehouses.

14. (SBU) Asked about storage conditions for the U.S. rice,  
Sato said the imported rice is kept in several warehouses,

both those owned and operated by MAFF and subcontracted to third parties. The temperature within the storage facilities, Sato explained, is generally maintained at 15 degrees Celsius or lower, with adequate dehumidification, and that both the climate conditions and the rice itself are regularly monitored. Sato initially declined emboffs' request to provide logs recording temperature, humidity, warehouse locations, and length of time in storage, arguing the USG should "trust" MAFF to ensure the necessary conditions for storage of imported rice. He later said he would look into the feasibility of providing this information. Embassy will follow-up with him on this request.

ZUMWALT